OPEN ACCESS IN LIBRARY

1. SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF LIBRARY

S. R. RANGANATHAN

Gives a list of definitions of terms used. Enumerates eight social functions of library. States the Five Laws of Library Science and shows their implications on the various types of libraries.

1 PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Terminology

1.1.1 Thought - An assumed term.

1.1.2 Work - Thought expressed in language and/or symbols or in any other mode, and thereby made communicable.

1.1.3 Document - Record of work on paper or other material, fit for physical handling, transport across space, and preservation through time.

A document is usually distinguished into book, periodical, and serial such as almanac, directory, and yearbook. Precise definitions of these terms are necessary in the study of Library Science. Such definitions are given in Ranganathan's *Heading and Canons: comparative study of five catalogue codes* (1955). There a book is further distinguished into simple book, composite book, ordinary composite book, and artificial composite book. This is necessary in the study of classification and cataloguing.

For the study of open access, it is helpful to distinguish documents on the basis of their physical make-up, into the following categories

1.14 Book - A document with an independent physical existence, made of fairly durable paper, bound more or less strongly, of size comfortable and safe to handle - i.e. with height, width, and thickness within prescribed limits - available in several copies, and neither rare nor of unusual bibliographical, sentimental, or monetary value.

1.15 Abnormal Document - A document with an independent physical existence, but lacking one or more of the features prescribed for a book.

It may be a pamphlet, a miniature volume, a giant volume, a volume on art paper or any other weak paper, a rare volume, an out-of-print volume in demand but not likely to be re-published, a volume with unusual bibliographical, sentimental, or monetary value, a volume with too many plates, a rare volume, a gramophone record, or any other physical embodiment. A book may also be declared to be an abnormal document, by law or regulation of a library, for a specified period or permanently, and be made available only for restricted use; a textbook, much in demand, is an example.

1.16 Micro Document - A document forming part of another document and without its own
independent physical embodiment, or an equivalent one such as a pamphlet, a reprint, or a clipping embodying only specialised thought of narrow extension and great intension, though with an independent embodiment.

An article in a periodical, a contribution to a symposium or any other kind of composite book, or part of a book is an example of micro document.

117 Library - An institution collectively owned and maintained by a community - be it a nation, local body, education institution, research institution, business organisation, government department, or any other corporate body - holding a collection of documents for the use of the members of the community and to such others as may be allowed by it, and charged with the duty of promoting adequate and proper use of the collection by all the members of the community.

From this point of view, a library may be described as a socialised collection of documents. A copy of a document in a library may itself be described as a socialised document.

1171 Public Library - A library open to the general public residing in an area.

1172 Institutional Library - A library open only to the members of the institution for whom it is maintained.

1173 Service Library - A library with service to contemporaries as the primary purpose.

1174 Dormitory Library - A library with preservation for the use of posterity as the primary purpose.

12 Social Institution

The definition given in section 117 excludes a private collection of an individual or of a family from the connotation of the term 'library' as used in this study of open access. It is essential that the collection is for the use of all the members of a specified community or corporate body. In this sense, a library is a social institution. It is a social institution in another sense also. It is established and maintained as a help to the promotion of social well-being, continued social betterment, and cultural continuity. Thus a library is a multipurpose institution.

13 Eight Purposes

The social function of a library has never been a single one. It has been added to from time to time. The emphasis has shifted from one function to another from time to time. The future may also bring new functions. The emphasis too will shift. Today the following eight functions are recognised:

1 Preservation of documents for posterity;
2 Promotion of use of documents by contemporaries;
3 Provision of equal opportunity to all to benefit by the use of documents;
4 Provision of a means for beneficial use of leisure time;
5 Provision of a means for the conservation of research potential;
6 Promotion of productivity drive;
7 Promotion of the conservation of natural and industrial resources; and
8 Promotion of peaceful co-existence within a community and among nations.

14 Advent of Printing

In the pre-printing days, each copy of a book had to be written by hand. It was a long, tedious, and costly process. Many a book had only a single copy. No book had copies sufficient in number to take away from it its rarity value. Therefore, the emphasis was naturally laid on the first function. To preserve it, a book was even chained to the shelf by some libraries. But after the advent of printing, the second function of promotion of contemporary use became more practicable. With the invention of machinery for paper-making, printing, and binding, this function came to be actively discharged by the library world. This trend began to develop in the second half of the nineteenth century. Since then the first two functions came to receive equal emphasis.

15 Advent of Democracy

About the same time, democracy began to permeate country after country. As a social
principle, it insisted on equal opportunity for all. This insistence permeated the library world also. The right of each person to have free access to books in the measure of his capacity to read and benefit by them has now come to be accepted. Books have come to be truly socialised. Again, as a political principle, democracy distributes sovereignty among all the persons of a nation. Therefore, the democratic form of government depends for its success on the informed enlightenment of every citizen. This has made the state interested in the diversion of the leisure time of everybody towards profitable self-education. This has led to the library taking up the third and fourth functions listed in section 13.

16 Advent of Population Pressure

The twentieth century is witnessing population pressure reaching beyond the capacity of the more or less free gift, by nature, of food, clothing, and building materials. These have now to be supplemented by materials synthesised out of those not fit for use in their native state. Moreover, the raw materials and the intermediate or the ultimate commodities have to be carried quickly across the surface of the earth, before losing value. These factors have necessitated the conservation of the research potential of humanity. We cannot any longer indulge in each gifted man doing his own research in isolation. Research has to be done in series, as it were, by large teams spread over the earth. Unintended and unnecessary repetition of the same work by different persons has to be avoided. Further the time of the research team has to be saved from being spent on search for embodied knowledge. These factors have made a library assume the fifth function. It has to help in the conservation of the research potential of humanity.

161 Productivity Drive

To enable society to get the full benefit of the discoveries, inventions, and technical developments made from time to time by research teams, the technician and the common worker have to be constantly kept informed and self-educated of the latest methods of work.

This step in Productivity Drive has come to be recognised during the last few years. Efforts are being made to produce literature written in a style suited to them. They are not intellectuals who can take to books voluntarily. This has made the library play a new part to help in the Productivity Drive. This part takes the form of aggressive reference service and extension work.

162 Conservation of Resources

Again, population pressure calls for the conservation of the resources of the world. This requires no doubt proper planning by the state. But it also requires that every citizen should be educated in the rational utilisation of materials and avoidance of waste. To conserve the material, plant, animal and industrial resources, the co-operation of everybody is necessary. For this, everybody has to be helped to inform himself in the matter through self-education. The library has naturally to be an important agency in this matter. This is now beginning to make the library exercise the seventh function.

163 Peaceful Co-Existence

Centuries of more or less isolated existence has left a legacy of the chain of mutual ignorance, suspicion, fear, and violence among communities. This has begun to lessen among the communities within a nation; but, it still persists between nations. The Identity in man is occulted by the differences in their respective physical peculiarities such as colour and cultural practices. Socialisation and circulation of the spontaneous thought and warblings of the thinkers of each nation among the people of all other nations can help in penetrating through these more or less superficial differences and reaching at the verities of Identity lying deep in the hearts of all. Bad thought, laid bare to world-community, will get sterilised. Good thought, circulated among the world-community, will lead to the creation of better thought. In this process, the library can function as messenger of light. In our own lift-time, the library is beginning to take this up as its eighth function.
17 Normative Principles

To-day, all the eight functions have to be fulfilled with equal emphasis by the library system of a country. Library practices have to be developed systematically and purposefully with all the social purposes in view. This will have to be a continuing process responding nimbly to changes in social demands. This is best done if their evolution is based on library science. Library science falls within the domain of social sciences. Therefore it has to include, in its cycle of scientific method, normative principles instead of hypotheses. The following normative principles are assumed. They were formulated in India in 1928. They were published in 1931 in the book Five laws of library science. These are

1. Books are for use;
2. Every reader his book;
3. Every book its reader;
4. Save the time of the reader; and
5. A library is a growing organism.

The Library manual, published in 1953, gives a more rapid account of these five normative principles.

18 Library System

The eight social functions of a library do not all work in the same direction. A single library cannot discharge all of them. To reconcile all the different functions, a country has to develop different kinds of libraries and to weave them into a national library system. This is a major problem in library organisation.

181 National Central Library

The National Central Library is to specialise a dormitory collection. The "Every" in the Second Law, as applied to it, places emphasis on the future generation rather than on the present. To give effect to this, the "Every" in the Third Law, as applied to it, is usually brought into full force in respect of certain materials such as newspapers, serials, textbooks, fiction, and cheaper books, only after the lapse of some years after their acquisition. Some lenience is shown in the fulfilment of the Fourth Law also. In regard to the Fifth Law, a National Central Library grows in size for ever. In this respect, the growth of its collection is like that of a child. Consequently, the growth of its shelf space and of its stack-room has also to be like that of a child. The growth has to be continuous addition to size. In a big country or in one with several languages, the National Central Library may have to be supplemented by a number of Regional Central Libraries. In India, the name State Central Library has been used in the Library development plan (1951) to designate a Regional Central Library.

182 Service Library

A Service Library does not pay particular attention to the first function. Its main concentration is on the second function, viz. use by contemporaries. As applied to it, the "Every" in the Second Law emphasises everybody of the present. So also the "Every" in the Third Law emphasises the documents with live interest in the present day in preference to the outmoded ones. The "Growing" in the Fifth Law connotes adult-growth—that is, growth by replacement of documents rather than continued increase of the size of the collection. In other words, we can postulate a ceiling to the size of the collection and to the stack-room space. Among service libraries, two kinds may be distinguished: those specialising in the service of microdocument, and those specialising in the service of book. The former is used by specialists; and the latter by generalists, if we can use this word coming into currency in the American language.

183 Business Library

The library specialising in the service of microdocument is very selective in its clientele and in its documents. Within this restricted range, it seeks to satisfy Laws 2, 3, and 4 to as near to perfection as possible. The librarian of such a library should know intimately each one of his readers and each one of his documents, as if there were only one reader and one document. The absolute size of its collection is usually smaller than in any other kind of library. Discarding of outmoded material is done drastically and frequently. It may
not put any restriction on the number of documents lent out to any reader at any one time. Similarly, it may abstain from putting any restriction on the time for which they are lent out. It is usually owned by a body or institution engaged in production, commerce, research or administration. Its main objective is the fifth function. There is now a trend to have the sixth function also attached to it. Indeed, productive drive can be effective only if both of the functions 5 and 6 are carried out with equal efficiency. A library of this kind may be called a Business Library.

184 General Library

As against a business library, we have the General Library. Its clientele is usually large. It consists practically of the entire public of a locality or of an educational institution. It concentrates more on the service of books than on that of micro documents. Its books are mainly selected with an eye to functions 3, 4, 7 and 8. In other words, elevating recreative study, general information and enlightenment, and promotion of civic sense, and sense of world-state are its chief objectives. Its ceiling to the size of collection or stack-room is much larger than for a business library.

185 National Pool

The differentiation into dormitory, business and general library is only a matter of emphasis. It is seldom that we have a pure specimen of any kind. But, generally speaking, the library practices of the different kinds of libraries, in regard to book selection, book-weeding, and service to readers, different from one another. Moreover, the present trend is to regard the book collections in all the libraries in a country as if they form a single national pool. Except for the documents in the dormitory collections, a great mobility obtains in the case of books. Inter-library loan, and even inter-library transfer are being freely practised among the libraries in a country. This is a consequence of the great weightage now being given to functions 2 and 3 as applied to the library system of a country taken as a whole. The service libraries of a national system act on the belief that the destiny of a book is in the hands of readers. Book is regarded as thought energy packed and kept in a latent state. The business of a service library is to bring it into an active state, so that it may irradiate every human mind and get itself enriched, by the new thought created by the readers. One of the endeavours of Unesco should be to coordinate the different national library system into a world-library-system. At present, it is more an ideal than a reality. But a test for the different national library systems having discharged the eight function satisfactorily is the realisation of an organic world-library system.

(To be continued)